

PRESS RELEASE

House Armed Services Committee Bob Stump, Chairman

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OPENING REMARKS OF CHAIRMAN BOB STUMP FULL COMMITTEE MARKUP OF H.R. 4546 FISCAL YEAR 2003 NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT

The committee meets this morning to mark up the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal year 2003.

For the second year in a row, the committee faces an unconventional approach to funding the activities of the Department of Defense for next year. Last year, we did not receive the total defense budget until late in the summer due to the extended transition and study by the new administration.

This year, we have been asked to consider a budget framework that has two parts. One comprised of the baseline budget for next year. The second part consisting of a \$10 billion request for as yet undefined costs of waging the ongoing war against terrorism.

This unusual Administration proposal has now been endorsed in the House Budget Resolution and thus it requires that we adjust our process to reflect this approach. It is no secret that many of us were highly skeptical of whether this is the best way for Congress to handle the fiscal year 2003 defense budget. However, we agreed to go along with it only with the assurance that this was not a mere budget gimmick and that the Administration will indeed provide us sometime later this summer with the second part this budget request to allow both the authorization and appropriations committees to fully and properly consider it.

Therefore, in keeping with this approach, today's mark-up will have two parts. First, we will consider H.R. 4546, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2003, which is the conventional baseline authorization bill for next year.

In addition, we will also take partial action on a second bill, H.R. 4547, the Cost of War Against Terrorism Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2003. This second bill will serve as the legislative vehicle for consideration of the budget proposal we expect to receive later this year to fund the costs of the war on terrorism.

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While the plan is to complete action and report out H.R. 4546 in order to keep to our floor schedule of next week, we will not complete action on the second bill, H.R. 4547. Instead, I plan on offering a managers amendment to this bill, which was developed in full consultation with Ike Skelton and would transfer a discrete number of items from the budget request we have received into the “cost of war” bill. This bill, as amended, would then be put on the shelf until the committee receives the additional cost of war request and can complete action on this important component of the defense budget for next year.

Once you get past these procedural challenges, the budget proposal before us once again represents a significant and urgently needed funding increase for our nation’s military. Last year, I said at this point that the new Administration’s budget strategy was to fix the people problems first and tackle the remaining infrastructure and modernization problems next. Since then, the hard realities of September 11 have rightly reshuffled priorities and we must now add to this list the urgent need to successfully wage and win our fight against global terrorism.

However, the desperate state of our military infrastructure and modernization programs will not disappear or improve merely because we are at war. We have to successfully attack both sets of problems.

Accordingly, the committee has taken great care to balance these competing priorities and will be making a series of recommendations to strengthen infrastructure, modernization and important personnel and retiree benefits.

I will defer to each subcommittee to detail the great work they have done in this regard and commend the Chairmen and Ranking members of each for putting forth solid recommendations in each of their areas.

Before proceeding, I also want to take a moment to acknowledge that this will be the last defense authorization mark-up for a number of us. Last week, I announced my intention to retire from the House after the end this term. I merely want to say to my colleagues what a particular honor it is to serve with you on this committee and as Chairman for the past two years.

In addition, we also have a number of valuable members of this committee that will be leaving after this year for other pursuits:

Jim Hansen of Utah,
Saxby Chambliss of Georgia,
Van Hilleary of Tennessee,
Lindsey Graham of South Carolina,
Bob Riley of Alabama, and
Rod Blagojevich of Illinois.

The committee will have another opportunity later in the year to recognize these colleagues more fully.

Before recognizing Mr. Skelton, I would like to make several administrative announcements.

First, the intention is to finish markup today or tonight. Given the number of topics we are expected to cover, today will likely be a long and tiring day. However, I am confident that the committee will keep the debate substantive and not personal.

In addition, due to the likelihood of record votes on the Floor as well as in here, I urge everyone to promptly return to the markup following Floor votes, the lunch break or any unavoidable absences.

We have arranged to have lunch and dinner provided for all of us. At an appropriate point in a few hours, I will suspend markup for 30-40 minutes to allow everyone to eat lunch, which will be in the anteroom. However, I plan to promptly reconvene and continue with markup.

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